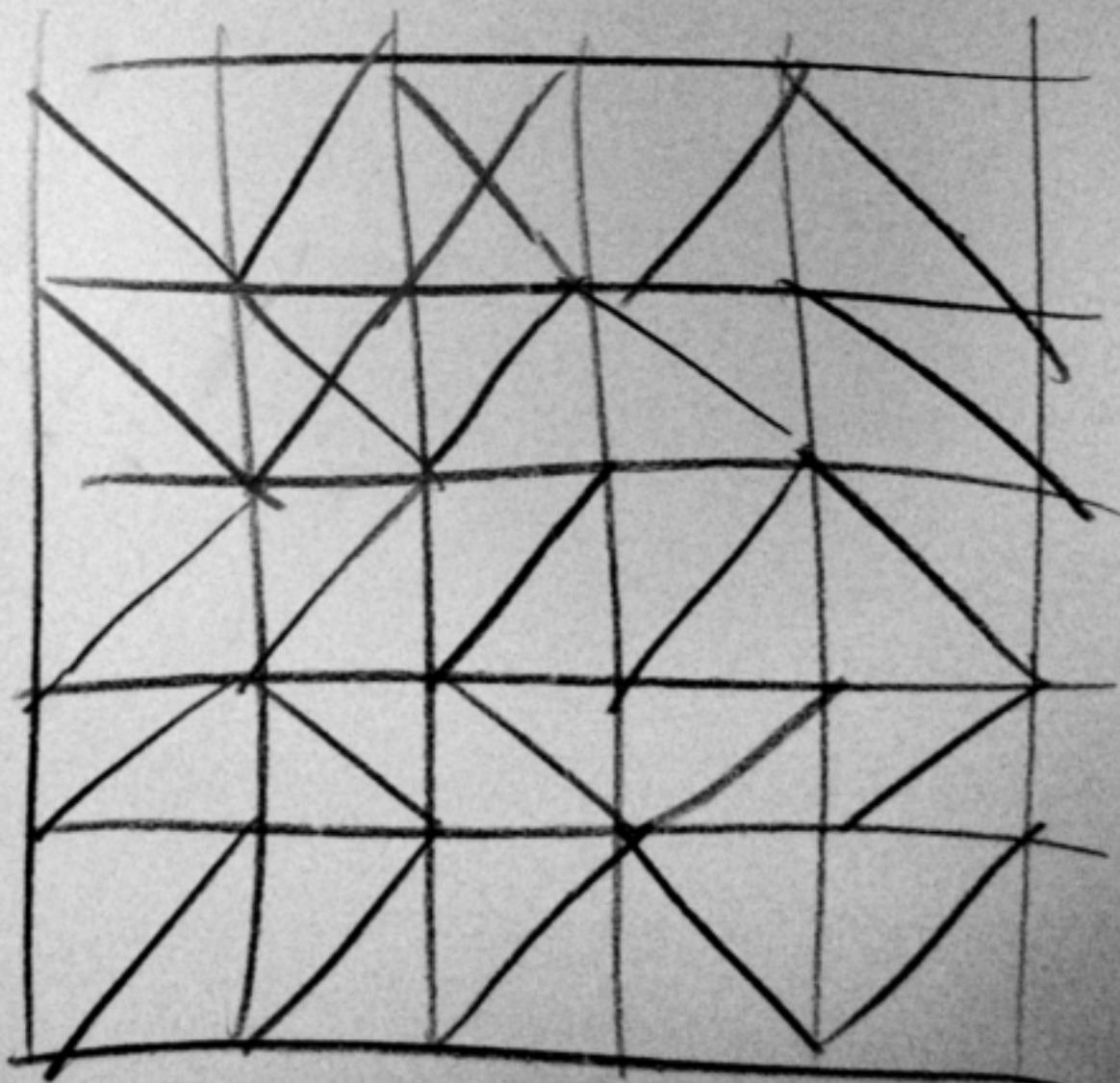


SELF-REGULATION

VS.

SELF-ORGANIZATION





This zine is a follow-up on a round-table discussion at Locatie Spatie about self-organization on 09.12.2016.

As representative of the Zinedepo zinelibrary at Locatie Spatie I tried to advocate a viewpoint that was in accordance with zineculture.

The question I was left with after the discussion was:

*What was really meant when people used the term Self-Organisation?*

To try to answer this I thought it might be useful to adopt a Wikipedia category and distinguish between Self-regulation and Self-organization.

**Self Regulation:** An example of self regulation is a cleaning schedule in a student house. It refers to sets of rules and regulations that are formulated internally. Usually a schedule is made after a consensus or certain level of agreement is achieved in a group meeting. In alternative organizations there is often an appeal on the solidarity between the different members.

Self regulation is a major theme in most types of organizations. Self regulation has a long history (medieval guilds practiced self-regulation when they laid down rules for their trades) and there is a lot of literature on the subject and plenty of models have been developed. I personally think that there is no ideal model and that any model that is agreed upon by all members is probably good enough.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Consensus\\_decision-making](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Consensus_decision-making)

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Industry\\_self-regulation](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Industry_self-regulation)

[https://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zelfregulering\\_\(bestuur\)](https://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zelfregulering_(bestuur))

**Self Organization:** A well known example of self-organization or ‘spontaneous order’ is the swarm behaviour of a flock of starlings (spreeuwen). In this kind of self-organization order arises spontaneously out of a chaotic system. *“The process is spontaneous, not needing control by any external agent. It is often triggered by random fluctuations, amplified by positive feedback. The resulting organization is wholly decentralized, distributed over all the components of the system. As such, the organization is typically robust and able to survive or self-repair substantial perturbation. Chaos theory discusses self-organization in terms of islands of predictability in a sea of chaotic unpredictability.”*

The term self-organization was introduced during the cybernetic revolution of the 1940’s and the concept inspired a lot of the ideals underlying the 1960’s counter-culture movements in the West. Other examples are the internet or so-called cellular automata.

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Self-organization>

<https://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zelforganisatie>

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Whole\\_Earth\\_Catalog](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Whole_Earth_Catalog)

In this zine I will address, mainly from personal experience, the latter concept of *self-organization*.

I got the impression that at the round table there was a preference for this kind of self-organization. Probably because it appeals to a feeling of diy, anti-authoritarianism, anarchism, chaos and individual freedom in Punk culture.

## Zineculture and Self-organization

**I started making zines in the early 90's** out of a necessity to connect to likeminded spirits that I could not find in the small town I was in (there was some primitive internet at the time but no online social networks).

I think zineculture is a good example of self-organization. Zineculture is a coherent recognisable culture without a central controlling agency, without a prescribed structure or set of rules. Zineculture has emerged out of the voluntary actions of more or less connected individuals. There are no rules to become part of zineculture other than make a zine and 'get it out there'.

It is a non-profit culture that got its current shape out of the variable input of energy, time and money of different more or less talented individuals with different motives from different countries, scenes backgrounds, varying over a long period of time. Its history can be traced back more than 100 years, however 'zineculture' as a unique and clearly identifiable culture is much younger.

Ideally every zinester is at the same time a maker, a publisher, a collector and a promoter of zineculture. Reviewzines have always been very important in zineculture. Reviewzines like Poopsheet or today's Xerography debt. connect zinemakers. But many zines that are not reviewzines as such also include addresses of other zinepublishers.

And ideally, when you do a project together with another zinester you both release the zine separately so the material is spread around two networks. You probably both lose money but you gain exposure (followers).

Zineculture is independent of genre, style or political preference.

There are music zines, comic zines, artzines, grrrl zines, queer zines, hate zines, nazi zines, anarchist zines, hacker zines, zines about personal interests, poetry zines etc., the list is as long as there are interests, and they are all part of zineculture as a whole.

**FCKN'BSTRDS is a chaotic noise performance** project that first performed in 1997. It started as a deliberate experiment with self-organization.

The simple and naive idea was that everybody could join, climb on stage and express him/herself freely.

Even though I initiated the project, the intention was to have no central control or authority. There were no meetings, no rehearsals, no rules, no prescribed roles. We would usually meet at the show shortly before it started and just go on stage and 'go at it'.

It was chaos. But all players were dedicated and invested, money time and energy into the project.

There was always positive feedback on shared stage experiences.

In my opinion, the moment of real self organization in FCKN'BSTRDS was the moment there was a kind of *stable identity* (probably around 3/4 years of existence). This was visible in that- if a new player arrived, he or she would not need to be instructed because they automatically subject to the shared identity without it being controlled externally. This was probably also due to the fact that the audience by now had a certain expectation of the event.

Therefore this identity exists independent of individual players.

And as a consequence the project has become very resilient against external disturbances.

It is definitely the longest running project I was ever involved in (even though I am no longer part of it). This consistency over time may also have some relation to the nature of the medium; the noise was a product of a series of analogue interconnected electronic feedback loops, and this structure was continuously reflected upon. So there was a congruence at all levels (form, content, structure, sound etc).

## **Some insights on self-organization drawn from personal experiences;**

**Contributing to zineculture** can become costly and time-consuming. Self organization means investing time and energy into something that you can't control and you don't always get back what you expect from it. In that case it is just a 'responsibility'

**The payoff is 'spontaneous organization'** and not money or a job!

Real self-organization depends on the voluntary input of energy (time and money) of individuals. For it to succeed you need to be prepared give/invest more than you receive.

A project can be financially unprofitable and still be successful and appealing to invest.

For example, members of FCKN'BSTRDS have started solo projects on the reputation and network of the project.

**External funding like grants are risky**, because the money is not internally motivated and it installs a kind of external on/off button.

**A project of self-organization is not a project of consensus:** Regular meetings in a classic sense are not useful because self-organization is inherently unpredictable and only happens out of the actions of the players not out of the rules agreed upon.

**You need a lot of patience**, and accept that there are probably a lot of failures, and the project might never be successful in arriving at a stage of real self-organizing.

**Self organization does not necessary make the world a better place:**

If you start with a project of true self-organization then you better forget about ideas of political left or right. Because there is no controlling agent, the organization is the result of the actions of individuals and it is possible that it will only 'work' if everybody accepts this absence of end-control.

Consequently you cannot know or decide beforehand what the project will turn out to be. For example whether or not it will be a politically correct organization. Because self-organization happens and needs to happen spontaneous.

**Self organization does not automatically mean everybody ends up at a position that is equal or fair;**

For example I invested a lot more personal money and time into the project than others at the time without necessary receiving a higher payoff; however I still thought it was worth it at the time.

**Sometimes artists present** themselves as d.i.y., but are not actively connecting to the world. They might suggest a construction where, if you invest some more in the network, they will invest some more in the creative process. If this is structural, you will have less time to produce your art. You end up becoming a shopkeeper with all the obligations but without the profit, while the other has all the time to focus on the art. (To be honest I have enabled plenty of these situations in the hope that my actions are infectious. And admittedly have also at times got a label to release a zine or noiseproject without returning the favour).

**In a project of self organization you can only be involved completely**, there is no ‘outside’ position. It is all-encompassing. Therefore making it your fulltime job is probably unwise. You need to be capable of setting your personal boundaries when it comes to time spent, saying no etc.

There is a risk of sectarianism. While on the other hand, it is not ‘collectivism’ because self organization follows from autonomous, local and individualistic sometimes egoistic action.

**You know beforehand** that many things are not going to be effective for the kind of self-organization you are looking for: For example in a noise performance, an automatic repetitive tekno beat produced by an algorithm that runs underneath the entire performance is going to function as a controlling agent. There was a moment in the 3d year existence of the FCKNBSTRDS project that a member introduced some personal friends from his local town to the project. These guys came from a different scene and brought computers to the project with pre-programmed beats, and during live performance were hiding behind them. And because they had a shared history among them that predated the project they were not affected by the emerging collective identity of the project. I convinced the others to not let them join, which meant that against the principle of self-organization, I acted as a leader and the project now had limits, and was defined by rules.

**People with serious mental issues** or drug/alcohol-addicts can have a negative effect on an open ‘uncontrolled’ project. A free and anarchistic project can be very appealing to savants and outsiders who have a desire to escape rigid rules of society but in fact need a clear structure to function. If these become part of the project they can be quite destructive and the others may be forced to install a kind of regime or everybody is dragged into their madness. But then the question arises: will you allow only the mentally stable to join?

**Intentional uncontrolled chaos** has its core a schizophrenic paradox; To have “no meetings, no rehearsals, no rules, no prescribed roles” is also a rule and a prescribed role.

And “Do whatever you feel like” is a kind of total freedom that creates at the same time an almost unbearable pressure. Because what you feel like is not always clear, and having to make these kind of existential decisions all the time can be quite exhausting. Sometimes it can be relaxing to simply follow a schedule.

**A radical self-organization project** is probably not advisable nor is it really possible when you run a public kitchen or an educational project for kids.

When you run a public kitchen, you are already to such an extend submitted to many laws regarding hygiene and health (like any company dealing with food) that it is hard to imagine any kind of self-organization at all.

The same goes for educational projects.

And because its foundations are chaotic and disorganized, a self-organization project maybe ad odds with the right to a stable workspace in the case of rented studios.

**To conclude;**

**There is a tension between self-organization and self-regulation:**

*The more regulation the less self-organization.*

*Self regulation can turn out in a vast system of written and unwritten rules that can have a restricting effect.*

*On the other hand, without any form of regulation, self-organization can turn into a self-destructive system.*

*Some rule-based structure or network set-up before you enter an experiment with self-organization is probably better than a naïve 'laissez faire' approach.*

<b>Self regulation</b>	<b>Self Organization</b>
<i>Schedule</i>	<i>Chaos</i>
<i>Consensus/meetings</i>	<i>Spontaneous</i>
<i>Controlled system</i>	<i>Automatic/Autonomous system</i>
<i>Goal directed/future oriented</i>	<i>Moment to moment</i>
<i>Outcome is more or less independent of the kind of people involved.</i>	<i>Outcome depends a lot on the kind of people involved,</i>
<i>Responsibility</i>	<i>Creativity</i>
<i>Stable from the start</i>	<i>Stability not guaranteed beforehand</i>
<i>Risk totalitarian, bureaucratic, too much talk</i>	<i>Risk chaos, unethical, self-destructive</i>

## Hybrids:

With hybrids I refer to(often technology based) forms of self-regulation that enable a certain amount of self-organization on an individual level in the organization.

**Self-management;** “*or workers' self-management is a form of organizational management based on self-directed work processes on the part of an organization's workforce*”

**Self-rostering** (zelfroosteren); “*With self-rostering (also called self-scheduling, prioritized working hours or self-selected working hours), employees may select working hours which fit their personal needs and preferences.*”

[http://www.bath.ac.uk/management/cri/pubpdf/Research\\_Reports/17\\_Bartle\\_Vass.pdf](http://www.bath.ac.uk/management/cri/pubpdf/Research_Reports/17_Bartle_Vass.pdf) (ideas on self-organization in business models)

<http://www.ephemerajournal.org/contribution/peter-kropotkin%E2%80%99s-anarchist-vision-organization>

“*Kropotkin's ideal and free society of the future strongly resembled the decentralized and federative structures of the Middle Ages. In short, he conceived of a society without government: 'All the mutual relations of its members are regulated, not by laws, not by authorities, whether self-imposed or elected, but by mutual agreements between the members of that society and by the sum of social customs and habits – not petrified by law, routine, or superstition, but continually developing and continually readjusted in accordance with the ever growing requirements of a free life stimulated by the progress of science, invention, and the steady growth of higher ideals'*”

**Basic models of flocking behaviour are controlled by three simple rules:**

1. *Separation - avoid crowding neighbors (short range repulsion)*
2. *Alignment - steer towards average heading of neighbors*
3. *Cohesion - steer towards average position of neighbors (long range attraction)*

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flocking\\_\(behavior\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flocking_(behavior))

